zcr

interviews

From San Francisco Bay Guardian

https://web.archive.org/web/20080706201105/http://www.sfbg.com/39/43/art_music_zipcoderapists.html

On the offensive

Did onetime Bay Area-based musical subversives the Zip Code Rapists truly make "the worst record of all time"?

By Will York

NOT SINCE THE Eagles' 1994 "Hell Freezes Over" reunion tour has there been a rock reunion of such magnitude. OK, that's a slight exaggeration, but for some of us, the Zip Code Rapists' improbable 10th anniversary reunion in their old hometown is a momentous occasion.

On the rock history radar, ZCR are a blip, of course, but their live shows are legendary, at least among locals who saw them and got the joke. Even if you didn't get to see the duo during their brief life span from 1992 to '95, their live recordings – scattered across the albums 94124 and Sing and Play the Three Doctors and Other Sounds of Today (1992 and 1995, respectively, on Amarillo) and documented more fully on the recently released Here at Last: Zip Code Rapists Live (Freedom From) – tell the story well. This was a one-of-a-kind combo, with a natural entertainer and comedian in vocalist Gregg Turkington and a remarkably flexible and tolerant straight man in guitarist John Singer.

"We had the latitude to do anything," Singer explains over the phone from Vermont, where he now lives. "A lot of it had to do with the push and pull between the audience and the band. Some shows would turn into confrontations, with stuff being thrown; other shows would turn into sing-alongs." For one of their shows at the now-defunct Chameleon, they brought along a Stephen Foster songbook and performed a set consisting entirely of patriotic songs like "The Old Folks at Home," Turkington remembers. The versatile talent is also the mastermind behind Amarillo Records, Faxed Head, nationally known comedian Neil Hamburger and the Great Phone Calls prank calls CD, reissued by Ipecac several years ago.

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At another show, they served the audience ranch-style beans on plates made out of trade magazines from their jobs at a local chemical company. And at the record-release party for Sing and Play, they simply sat in the audience and watched as impersonators from Caroliner and Mr. Bungle took care of their set for them.

Sometimes they even played original songs, but more often than not, they opted for covers. As amusing and odd as their song choices were – Tony Orlando's "Tie a Yellow Ribbon 'Round the Ole Oak Tree" and lots of late-period Who stinkers – they ultimately served as jumping-off points for the band's extra-musical antics, not as destinations. On their live recordings, Turkington seldom makes it past the first chorus without breaking something or launching into a foul-mouthed tirade against some unlucky audience member. He took other creative liberties as well: There's video footage of him smashing Pablo Cruise records over his head, wielding a blowtorch onstage, and breaking

The bears were a favorite stage prop, along with other inexplicable items, such as golf trophies, nonworking telephones, and a giant inflatable cigarette that they used for about a year. Hearing Turkington casually list these items brings to mind the eternal question about just about everything ZCR did: "Why?" And why, with no punch line in sight, was it so funny?

"I've said this in an interview before," Singer confesses, "but the closest I've come to wetting my pants as an adult was being onstage and seeing some of the stuff that Gregg would do." Still, what made the

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group tick is the dynamic between Turkington and his ambivalent foil, Singer. "I think that's really the key to the group," Turkington agrees, on the phone from LA. "Half the time he thinks it's really great, and half the time he's really disgusted with the whole thing. To this day, I really don't think he's made up his mind."

As a musical group, ZCR's reputation was poor – unfairly so. "The worst record of all time? It

Alas, the reunion show doesn't mean the Zip Code Rapists are back together as a functional band, but, self-professed show-biz hacks that they are, they're not above another reunion. After all, aren't the Eagles touring again this year? "The whole band was sort of predicated on the idea of making fools of yourselves and seeing what happens," Singer says. "There's no reason we can't do that when we get old."

Zip Code Rapists play with Horse-Cow and Daiquiri Fri/29, 9:30 p.m., Hemlock Tavern, 1131 Polk, SF. Call for price. (415) 923-0923.

From Crimewave

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Crimewave Can't Bust Our Music!
An Interview with the Zip Code Rapists

MM: Tell everybody who you are.

GT: Thank you for the opportunity. My name is Gregg Turkington and I am the founder of Amarillo Records.

MM: I thought Al Marillo was the founder of Amarillo Records...

GT: Not exactly. Mr. Marillo was very helpful at setting up office shelving at the beginning but he eventually had to return to his native Guatemala.

MM: O.K., let's say that I believe that it was you, and not Mr. Marillo, behind the record label, what made you start Amarillo Records?

GT: It was a way to meet girls.

MM: Tell us about the girls.

GT: Well, you meet all types. That's too broad of a question.

MM: O.K., tell us about one girl in particular then. Is there one that stands out?

GT: That one with the flower in her hair. What the Hell was her deal? She told me 10 tales and then wandered 'til spring. Sick.

MM: Alright, if you're not going to give us a serious answer about the girls, we'll take another route. Tell us about your band, The Zip Code

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Rapists. I hear you're back together.

GT: You heard wrong. Everyone's off "doing their own thing".

MM: But you did get back together for a while, after the ugly break-up and that period when you and John and your lawyers were publicly at war with one another.

GT: Oh yeah, we tried that out for awhile. We released a disastrous EP ("94124") and toured behind it, the whole nostalgia thing--but the magic and the money weren't there, so we had to give up the ghost. We did get back together long enough to record an O.J. Simpson -inspired 7" ("He Is Innocent"/"Guilty as Charged"), but it was never released. Our last show was in Osaka Japan in Nov. 1995.

MM: If you're looking for a label to put it out, your search is over. I've gone into debt over things far sillier (see ad for the Monkey Power Trio's new 7", "The Sound of No Hands Clapping"). Send me a tape.

GT: The problem wasn't so much a lack of a label, but lethargy. I will send you a tape. But you're better off going on vacation wit

MM: Alright, back to this ugly break-up between you and Therapist John Singer, the other man behind the Zip Code Rapists, what set it off in the first place?

GT: I can't even remember. You're talking ancient history. Now I've moved on. Doin' a new thing, singing a new song. He'd tell you the same.

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MM: OK, if you don't want to talk about the bad times, let's talk about the good times. When did you form the Zip Code Rapists, and what were the circumstances?

GT: I didn't say I didn't want to talk about the bad times. I said I didn't want to talk about ancient history. You media types, you think you can confuse us. But yes, those were great times. The old Zip Code Rapist days, we had a lot of fun. It started back in '91 and after one show we knew we were on to something. A real stripped-down approach, very emotional. Too bad it all got bogged down later in studio gimmickry.

MM: If you don't mind my asking, how did you meet Therapist John, and what made you decide to start a band together in '91?

GT: I don't remember. We're old chemical guys from way back, worked the chemical industry. But we had a band way back in '89, you may have heard of them, The Easy Goings. Cut a couple of records that went nowhere. Cut another record two years ago, with the original line-up: "The Come On Sign"/"Dancing In The Moonlight". That one got mastered and plated, but still hasn't been released. I bet it won't be. Too bad.

MM: What were you doing in the chemical industry?

GT: Earning a living! It certainly wasn't for pleasure. John is still involved in it.

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MM: So, what are you doing these days, or are you making a living at being in the music industry?

GT: You call this living? No, I'm certainly not. And only in America is it acceptable to ask people what they do for a living. You try that elsewhere, you'll get a fat lip. And since I was born elsewhere, I'm not saying.

MM: So, where were you born, or shouldn't I ask that either?

GT: Northern Territory, Australia.

MM: According to the latest Trouser Press Record Guide, you feel compelled to create rock music due to a desire for "public humiliation." What do you make of that?

GT: Not true. But it's nice to be in the same book with 2Pac.

MM: That same record guide says, "to call the Rapists a Ween tribute band is actually unfair - the lo-fi wailing of their first phase is hardly as skilled or ambitious as Dean and Gene's (Ween's). Since music sure ain't it, the pair's main talent seems to be for pathological put-ons, atrocious cover songs and carefree self-abasement." Would you say that was a fair assessment?

GT: They're right that it's unfair to call the Rapists a Ween tribute band--how can our whole band be a tribute to a group

that neither one of us is familiar with?! I've only ever heard one Ween record, and it didn't make much of an impression. As for the rest of it...whatever. There's nothing to gain by nitpicking about entries in record guides. I just wish they assigned one-to-five star ratings to each album like the old Rolling Stone Record Guide, where it was possible to suffer the indignity of receiving a black block rather than even one star.

MM: Back when you were still together, John Singer, your partner in the Zip Code Rapists, was quoted as saying that he was "disgusted" by the "hateful facet of ZCR." He also said that you were "too violent a character." What's your take on this hateful, violent aspect of your character?

GT: That's entertainment!

MM: Where do you draw the line between hate and entertainment?

GT: I deal strictly in entertainment. Hate should be confined to the privacy of one's own home.

MM: How would you say audiences respond to this particular brand of entertainment, which I've heard you refer to as the, "asshole routine"?

GT: It completely depends on the audience and the particular show. Some enjoy it and get something out of it, others walk

away disgusted. We haven't played in ages and of course the American public has gotten so much more sophisticated in the last few years.

MM: So, it's a mark of "sophistication" to enjoy being insulted and having things thrown at you.

GT: No, no, that's not what I said.

MM: Alright, maybe I was baiting you, trying to get you to explode so that all of our readers could see that legendary Turkington charm. I'm sorry. I'm just fascinated my that element of ZCR and I'm curious as to why you developed it

such as you did. Personally, I feel a great deal of contempt for audiences when I play, and I was wondering if it was the same for you. Is contempt at the root our your "hate and be hated" routine, or is it really, as you say, just an act for entertainment's sake?

GT: Never tease tigers! (As Bent Fabric put it.) I haven't had any respect for the world of underground music for years, if that's what you're fishing for.

MM: What do you have respect for? Let me try to guess; Andy Kaufman, G.G. Allin, Dada, Kiss... Who are your heroes?

GT: Phil Ochs, Albert Brooks, Barry Gibb, The Four Tops, The

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Temptations, Tupac Shakur, Tom Jones, Christopher Darden, Jimmy Webb, Brian Wilson, Warren Oates, Irma Juarez, Lou Rawls, Frank Sinatra Jr., Andy Kaufman, sure...a bunch more too. Way too many to list! So many great people! And I'm not even going to start listing off my talented pals.

MM: Speaking of your talented pals in the world of "alternative rock", someone just showed me a picture of you and John with the Joe Piscipo of the rock world, Henry Rollins.

GT: Oh yes, at his record signing. That was odd. We stumbled in to see what all the hullabaloo was about, and were on our way out the door when one of the store employees grabbed us and made us take a picture with Hank. They actually picked us out of the crowd for that honor. In all fairness though, Black Flag's "Damaged" LP really is the cream of the crop when it comes to punk rock recordings. It stands the test of time.

MM: Yeah, I like "Damaged" too, but, all in all, I think I like Mr. Rollins better as a body builder than as a singer. Let's talk about some of your other famous friends. How did you come to know the comedian Neil Hamburger?

GT: I saw a show in Reno, and offered to produce some recordings.

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MM: So, would you say you were responsible for "discovering" him? I'd never heard of him before he appeared on Amarillo's "Great Phone Calls" Record, and since then, I've been seeing his name everywhere. Just yesterday, a friend of mine (the same guy who showed me the Hank Rollins picture) told me that quite a few people believe that Neil Hamburger is actually Andy Kaufman.

GT: You need new friends. Yes, I "discovered" him in terms of setting him up to record for indie rock labels rather than the vanity-comedy labels that were releasing his cassettes in the past. But I didn't really "discover" him in that the guy is still broke and playing in pizza parlors to make ends meet. That's hardly being discovered.

MM: As for the Andy Kaufman thing, I take it that you don't think that's even worth commenting upon?

GT: Well, Andy Kaufman is amazing, but also amazingly dead. It's pretty well-documented. Neil Hamburger is maybe not so amazing, but it has been pretty well documented that he is among the living.
MM: Until I see a body, I'm going to keep on believing. As long as I believe that Aristotle Onassis was JFK, that Billy Shears is Paul McCartney, and that Courtney Love is Tina Yothers, I might as well believe that Neil Hamburger is Andy Kaufman.

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GT: That kind of independent thought is what helped make our country great.

MM: Last night Linette and I went out to see the band Half Japanese, and while we were there, I mentioned to someone that you and I were doing this e-mail interview. He called you a "sell-out". I personally like the label “sell-out”, but I was wondering what you thought of it.

GT: It's true, my works have made me a very, very wealthy man.

MM: According to him, you're a "sell-out" not because of how much money you’ve made (which I understand is considerable), but because of something that happened here in Michigan not so long ago. He tells me that you were here being road manager to Warner Brothers recording artists "Mr. Bungle", they weren't having too good a time. Apparently they had to play in someone's basement. I don't recall a lot of what was said, but the gist was that you turned your back on your dedicated and hard working Amarillo artists in order hobnob with the rich and famous.

GT: Your friend is a busybody. I was working, not hobnobbing. And I was working for Mr. Bungle, not Warner Brothers. But let him believe what he wants. If he'd rather hang out at smoky, nightmarish Half-Japanese shows HOBNOBBING with a bunch of jack-offs than stay at home

listening to great gems from the Warner Bros back catalog, good for him.

MM: There was no smoking at the show, it was hardly "nightmarish", and I wouldn't say that the guys in the band were exactly "jack-offs", in fact, they are probably among the nicest people I know. Aside from that, I'd say your assessment is correct. My friend is a busybody.

GT: Well, you're just baiting me anyway.

MM: Let's talk about your other famous friends now. Do you hang out with Anton LaVey now that you live in San Francisco, or is he just an employee of yours?

GT: I don't live in San Francisco anymore. I visit Anton LaVey from time to time, yes.

MM: What do you do when you get together, anything evil?

GT: If we did, I wouldn't tell you about it.

MM: Do you think that blood sacrifice gets a bad rap in the mainstream press?

GT: Blah blah next question please.

MM: Is there anything in particular that you would like to discuss?

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GT: I loved the movie "When We Were Kings". The bottom is about to fall out of the indie-rock market. Good! Fly Qantas. 2Pac is the greatest. Buy Barilla brand spaghetti sauce. McDonald's secretly soaks their fries in beef tallow. I love a parade.

MM: You've mentioned 2Pac at least three times in this interview so far, what's the fascination?

GT: I believe it, it's all I listen to anymore. Very compelling stuff. Fantastic, in fact. Qantas is fantastic too! Great food and service. A perfect safety record. You might consider putting together an article on the safety records of different airlines. You could really save lives with something like that. Southwest is another airline that can do no wrong. They keep costs low but still maintain a perfect safety record.

MM: If you were a regular reader of Crimewave, you'd know that we just did an exhaustive four part series on airline safety, but thanks for the advice. Now, have you ever been to the Black Cat piano bar in Oakland?

GT: No. Back in the old "Breakfast Without Meat" magazine days (he used to publish the magazine BWM), Lizzy and I used to go get sloshed at The Alley in Oakland, with Rod Dibble at the piano. He's been there for 30 years. But the Black Cat does not ring a bell.

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MM: O.K., maybe it was The Alley then. Someone just called to tell me that he saw your name scratched into a wall there. He thought that the name of the place was the Black Cat, but he wasn't sure. All he knew for sure was that it was a piano bar in Oakland and that your name was on the wall. I had no idea that I would find out so many trivial and seemingly meaningless things about you when I put the word out on the street that I was doing this interview. All of a sudden I have pictures of you paling around with Henry Rollins, sightings of your name carved into walls, stories of mistreated Amarillo bands, etc. It's kind of frightening in a way, how little privacy there is these days.

GT: It's scary alright, all these strangers knowing all these deep dark secrets. Heavy, heavy shit. I never scratched my name on a wall though.

MM: Do you want to hear a sad story about a boy you made cry?

GT: I guess so.

MM: It's not that bad actually. It's just that someone wrote you a few letters and sent you a few tapes back in the "Breakfast Without Meat" days and you never wrote back. You were kind of his hero and it broke his heart. Apparently he thought you would hear this version of Dion doing "Purple Haze" and want to be his friend. When you didn't respond to that, he sat down with a guitar and

did a version of "McArthur Park" for you. I guess he gave it up after a while and moved on the bug other people. Now he bugs Linette and I. (This sad little boy is none other than Crimewave's favorite whipping boy, Russ Forster, editor of 8 Track Mind.)

GT: We were almost fanatical about answering all our mail. Even if his tapes were a stone-cold bore he would have at least received a courteous thank-you note. I can't guarantee it but I suspect we never received his tapes, especially since your description of them does not ring a bell. Which is not to say I want to receive them now...!

MM: I'll pass that information along to him. I'm sure he won't believe you, but maybe it will give him some closure and allow him to finally put the incident behind him and move on with his life. I've heard quite a bit about your work as an actor. How is that going?

GT: Where do you hear all this shit? I'm not seeking work as an actor.

MM: As for it being "shit", I'm not sure, I'm just going by your own words. As for where I got the information, it came from an interview you did a few years back with the magazine "Your Flesh". In the interview you say that in addition to acting in an episode of Quincy, you had played the role of a Skinhead in a PBS film on American families. You sounded enthusiastic about acting, and I just

assumed that you were still pursuing it. I didn't know that you had given it up.

GT: Oh. Well, I was never pursuing an acting career. I just did that one film because someone asked me to, and my enthusiasm probably had more to do with the nice paycheck I received for 3 days of fairly pleasant work than with any aspirations to break into that particular line of work.

MM: Which episode of Quincy were you in?

GT: None. Someone was tampering with interview transcripts. I do like Jack Klugman though.

MM: Did someone also make up that bit about corporate sponsorships, or were multi-national corporations really buying you equipment and flying the Zip Code Rapists around the globe to play company picnics and the like?

GT: Of course not.

MM: Does it make you angry when people make thing like that up and try to pass them off as things you've said?
GT: I meant "of course not" as in "of course no one made up that bit--it's true!" But in regards to your next question...NO, not in fanzine interviews.

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MM: So, which companies are sponsoring your most recent musical venture, Faxedhead?

GT: None. And Faxedhead has been around since 1992.

MM: Can you answer rumors about witchcraft within the band?*

GT: Didn't you already ask that? We both know there are no such rumors.

MM: Have you ever been tempted to evil beyond your will to resist?**

GT: Only once, when someone kept trying to trip me up using a mirror.

MM: I'm sorry, I will put the mirror away now.

* Question taken verbatim from Gregg's Breakfast Without Meat interview with Canned Heat
** Question taken verbatim from Gregg's Breakfast Without Meat interview with American Music Club's Mark Eitzel
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MM: I asked Gregg to tell us about the bad times and the ugly break-up of ZCR and he wouldn't do it. He said

that both you and he had put all that behind you. Is that true, have you put it all behind you?

JS: Yes, absolutely. I've put it all behind me, and I'm looking forward to working with Gregg again in the near future.

MM: I'm trying to sell a magazine here, can't you give me just a little hatred and controversy? Tell us about the time that Gregg made you the most angry?

JS: The only times Gregg has ever made me angry is when I know he's not giving 100%. And those have been rare occasions, believe me.
MM: I apologize for pushing you, it's just that I'm getting frustrated by my interview with Gregg. All he wants to talk about it how great an airline Quantas is. I thought that you might be able to shed some more light on the confrontational side of the Zip Code Rapists; the insults, the table throwing, the break-up, the law suits, etc.

JS: No problem. I hate to be the one to suggest this, but we probably both feel the angry side of our "persona" is a little played out, and perhaps don't really know what to say about it. What happens when we are together on stage is one thing, and could accurately be called at times confrontational. But there is so much more that

could potentially go on that to rehash past "glories", so to speak, is probably not all that appealing.

My suggestion would be to ask the most outlandish (or normal) questions that you can think of that are not about the confrontational side. We, and Gregg especially, will probably come up with fairly entertaining answers that your reading public might find interesting. I would guess by your comments that positive words about an Australian airline fall outside of that. But you could always portray us as fools and has-beens who now can only talk about international travel, major label releases, and musical tastes that to your normal readers seem suspect. If you think Gregg's tastes are strange, ask me about mine--Gregg can't stand the music I listen to in most cases.

Anyway, sorry to be so pedestrian.

MM: OK, let's talk about your strange tastes in music then. I take it from listening to the songs on your most recent solo release, "Therapist John's Zip Code Revue", that your tastes run toward toward Country and Classic Rock. I very much like the record by the way.

JS: The story on the choice of material for the CD is not very exciting, really. The Zip Code Revue played together a total of six times, including the recording. We played live twice. The first show was on a bill with Melt Banana and Keiji Haino(sp), so we veered from lounge covers to start/stop speedy versions of Rapist's songs (hence the song Wired...etc.). The second show we played we were on the bill

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with some up and coming country-rock band (could have been Dieselhed?), so we decided to write some original material in that vein. The anti-3Doctor spin of the lyrics came about because members of that band stood in front of the door at the first show with flyers telling everyone coming in that we were a rip-off 50s cover band that were breaking the law by playing Zip Code Rapist songs. Since they seemed (at the time) hell bent on destroying our reputation, we responded with sincere lyrics of pain, confusion and hurt.

As for the classic rock aspect, we were reputed to be a bad lounge band so we responded by being a.....lounge band. Covers done at the shows that could have been on the CD included New Kid in Town (Eagles), #9 Dream (Lennon), By the Time I Get to Phoenix (the Isaac Hayes version, including long rap and horn parts), and a couple of others that are thankfully fading out of my memory.

We did work out 3 and 4 part harmonies on a lot of stuff, basically because everyone wanted to sing. My best memories of doing these shows include the time we were playing the now defunct Thirsty Swede on Haight Street, and one of the still prevalent hippie-types ran to the bartender and proclaimed that they finally had gotten a decent band to play there as we did a respectful version of #9 Dream. Also, the absolute thrill of hearing Mark Davies play the lead guitar lines from "New Kid" note for note still makes me smile. These guys were masters of any genre they put their minds to, the mark of greatness.

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The recording session has left me with never to be released versions of Ramblin' Man, Saturday in the Park, several more space jams, and many alternate takes (especially since most of it was live). And the full band has never played again—the only other material is a song written by Mark and I that came out on a Japanese only cassette compilation put out by Lost Frog, song title Burl Ives Dies at Disneyland. It was very rocky raucous guitar stuff which seems like a different group.

The "strange taste" comment was just a prompt, although I believe my tastes would not be reflected in the usual "scene zine". Which is not to imply anything regarding Crimewave—I have no idea what it's like. Care to fill me in?

MM: I was under the impression that you had been given copies of Crimewave by Greg. I've sent him issues for you and he's assured me that he would pass them along. As for your question though, the only scene that Crimewave is interested in is that between Linette and I. The magazine is ours and we do what we like with it. We don't care much for pandering to popular tastes. Perhaps that's why we don't sell to many copies.

I'm sorry to hear that you aren't still playing with the Zip Code Review, from the liner notes on your record "Abundance" it sounded as though you were really enjoying the experience of playing with "real" musicians for a change. Is there any chance we might see another record from the Review at some point in the future, or have you moved on to other projects?

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JS: The band members would probably get together in an instant if we had some idea or inspiration to gather around. I have probably been suffering from a bit of (for lack of a better word) scene burnout as of late. Any situation that depends on repeating your same tricks loses interest for me eventually, and I guess I haven't come up with the energy to present a new vision to the band or the world at large right now. Fortunately this has been accompanied by a lessening in the need for attention or validation from an audience, though I do miss the sharing of experience that used to happen.

As for another release, all I need is a reason and the resources to do it. Does this sound familiar? Keep in touch and you'll be the first to hear about it.

Other musical stuff I've done as of late is play guitar for others, including a surf band made up of Klaus Fluoride and East Bay Ray of the Dead Kennedys, Dave Scheff (x-Translator) and a couple of us other non-famous types. I play the weird parts that don't sound surfy, a sort of token noise/rock player on top of the traditionalism.

So what do you and Linette do to keep your scene alive? What matters to you two? And how and why have you taken an interest in the Zip Code Rapists?

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MM: The scene I'm in now is something of a TV watching, going to bed early scene. I like to get into bed by 10:00 PM so that I can hear the Jack Benny Show on the radio. A perfect day for me is a full mailbox in the morning, a nice bowl of soup for lunch (I go to the same place every day), a good episode of Unsolved Mysteries on TV (8:00 PM on the Lifetime network), a few chapters of a used mystery novel and then my old-time radio shows; throw in some big band music, some really old, scratchy blues records and an ice-water with lemon, and I'm in heaven. That's pretty much my life (outside of my incredibly awful job that is). I guess you could call that a scene. As for music, I don't go out much any more and I'm not sure what's going on. When I do go out, I just find myself getting angry at the kids I see, so what's the point. As for why I'm doing an interview with ZCR, at first it was because I was a fan from way back, and then it was because Greg kept pursuing it after I mentioned it to him. I guess I liked your work because it reminded me of my own at the time, very self-gratifying and condescending. I guess I thought it would be neat to put that into perspective now that some time has passed, that's why I guess I wanted to do an interview. What do you make of that?

JS: Well, it would be tough for me to call what we did self -gratifying, although it most certainly was at times. As I've said before in interviews, the beauty of ZCR was the way it both live and on record tried not to live up to expectations while at the same time being as completely in the moment as we could

possibly make it. The recordings obviously were not studio sculpted in the traditional sense, that of making things sound "right" or even wrong in a right way (a la the now fading lo-fi movement). But I stand by them even now as being documents that captured that moment, that energy in a very honest way. Everything we ever recorded was done quickly once we got started, and having logged many hours on other projects this was refreshing and liberating.

Live? How could anyone not think we were going for self -gratification or being condescending towards our audience? Those were huge elements in what was going on. But beyond that, what I think was the most interesting thing we did was take whatever was going on at a show--be it the mood of the audience, of us, our level of drunkeness, the bands we were on the bill with--and use that as the material to "do a show". This was risky, not easy, and meant that you had to be totally responsive every single time you performed at a level that your normal rock band doesn't ever have to approach. It can be enormously funny (Gregg has brought me the closest to wetting my pants as an adult that I will ever come) to the most pathetically sad spectacle I've ever seen, much less been a part of.

But all the above are just words that betray much of what it has been about. The act of trying to define the experience makes me feel bloated and self-important in a uncomfortable way.

From Crimewave

https://web.archive.org/web/20070524213605/http://www.crimewaveusa.com/pages/articlepages/zcr.html

Crimewave Can't Bust Our Music!
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Now old-time radio shows, that sounds better. I recently picked up an old Admiral console (AM and phono combined) that takes a full minute to warm up and moves my living room back in time 50 years every time it's on.

As for getting angry at the kids when you go out, I understand this completely. But somewhere, maybe even in the midst of the most stupidly narrow people that you see, is someone trying very hard to be wider and more open. Even as I wear out from the effort of this myself, I believe there are others still trying. Who knows, maybe you're one of them.

(In an era of artistic stagnation when other bands weren't doing much except for trying to find ways to cash in, the Zip Code Rapists gave us a new vision of the future. For that I will always appreciate them. While I don't whistle their tunes (except for maybe Wired), I enjoy their art and their courage for making it in the face of an unappreciative public. Bravo, Zip Code Gentlemen!
I would also like to say that few issues of Gregg's magazine, Breakfast Without Meat, that I have seen are among the funniest things I have ever seen in print. I can't believe that I didn't see them when they were first published. Even though they are years old now, they are still more relevant than 99% of the small press publications out there now, this one included.)

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from Your Flesh magazine, #28

THE ZIP CODE RAPISTS

Revenge of the Little Teapots, Short and Stout

by Seymour Glass

While many cities have produced their share of cultural icons, degenerate celebrities and artists of renown, one municipality has been oddly silent for years. Until now, that is. Amarillo, recognized as the chief city of the Texas Panhandle and home of the six-story stainless steel column built in 1968 to commemorate, somehow, the fact that large quantities of helium are found in the area, also serves as a key element in the genesis of a confrontational performance art band that does too many covers called the Zip Code Rapists. Now based in San Francisco, the duo of Gregg Turkington and John Singer both appalls and appeals to fans of The Spectacle. At times seeming like nothing more than a public display of a private joke between two people who hate each other, ZCR is also a magical confluence of mean-spirited humor, deadpan *carnaval vérité*, extreme pathos, the great noise only utter fury and detachment can produce, sincere musical moments, absolute failure to connect with the audience, and absolute success in connecting with the audience in ways it can't explain. Common is the urge to erect monuments that are supposed to eradicate shabbiness; the Zip Code Rapists, on the other hand, make a laughing stock out of dignity in whatever form it takes whereever they find it.

Throughout their body of work—Heyday's "Touch Me" b/w "Refried Boogie" seven-inch, a self-released LP on Amarillo Records called *The Zip Code Rapists Sing and Play "The Three Doctors" and Other Sounds of Today*, and, most recently, a ten-song EP for Ectoplasm called *The Man Can't Bust Our Music!* — Gregg and John hopscotch across the revulsion grid, paying lavish detail to certain conventions of entertainment and none to others. You never knows how or when they'll

photo by Gail Butensky

offer something valuable and then destroy it right before your eyes. Although they could easily mingle with various of the filth and violence royalty, they're no strangers to the ineptitude school of fuckhead rock either. Yet the course they're on is wholly unique: ZCR creates, as they did with their long version of a short Beatles song on the Peter Fonda tribute compilation ten-inch, a certain type of retarded, stupid, pointless, juvenile, pathetic, unfunny mess.

Many an audience member has stormed out of ZCR shows, angry at the absence of meaning, insulted by the arrogance and absurdity, afraid of the flying shards of glass, confused by the energy seemingly wasted on ZCR's elaborate ritual of loathing and self-pity. It would be quite the feat of eloquence to argue successfully that ZCR has anything of substance to offer—not so, however, if viewer demands weren't so eternally shallow and simple-minded. The Zip Code Rapists' "act" produces a weird feeling of satisfaction long after the fact, a delayed reaction caused by their blurring of indirect commentary-by-example and acting as mirror for the world around us. It is, after all, a deep, eternal mayhem that visits your memories unexpectedly, sometimes months later, like a particularly nasty, insane post-hypnotic suggestion.

Rather than selectively quoting musical styles, as is the avant garde vogue nowadays, rerouting, absorbing, co-opting, assimilating in that nifty postmodern-Roman Empire-imperialist manner, ZCR gets all the way inside genres, honoring the local rules instead of treating them as disposable affectations. As a consequence of this, they show us the merits of musical forms we'd casually dismissed long ago or, in some cases, never took seriously in the first place, as well as hold up for ridicule the fibers of life's awesome soundtrack your roommates take for granted as being valid forms of expression. I mean, I can't think of a British show tune that says anything to me, or to anyone I want to get to know, frankly. But John and Gregg mangle without impinging on authenticity, without a hint of condescension. Whether a ZCR show is the greatest theatrical experience of your life or just another sucky test of patience, blame it on Richard Harris and Whitehouse, not Gregg Turkington and John Singer.

The personal gains from numerous unfathomable corporate sponsorships are clear (because of a Ford truck jingle on the *Three Doctors* LP, Gregg's rent was paid for six months and John made a down payment on his own airplane); however, the audience frequently walks away from their shows clutching any number of sample products and ad gimmicks from tobacco companies, the automobile industry, and record shop free bins. The rewards of enduring the glee of a maniac in proximity to punishment—given and taken—are there for the brave with time on their hands.

Upcoming on the Zip Code Rapists' agenda are an irrelevant contribution to a tribute to the *Night of the Living Dead* compilation, a European seven-inch called *The Zip Code Rapists Sing and Play the Matador Records Catalog*, a live seven-inch for Amarillo, and an LP in the fall for Ectoplasm.

YF: Are you named after a real serial killer?

GT: Not to my knowledge.

YF: Would you feel responsible if you inspired a serial killer called the Zip Code Rapist?

JS: I don't think our name would inspire a serial killer any more than some mid-70's ABC made-for-TV movie would, especially ones where Mark Harmon plays the rapist. He's unbelievable as a rapist. You expect him to put his arm on a mountain and talk about Coors.

YF: That's exactly what I expect from you.

GT: We got our name when I cranked out a list in about two minutes when John was trying to think of a band name.

YF: What were some of the others?

GT: The Easy Goings, The Faxed Head, U.S. Saucer. Once we decided to use the Easy Goings, we decided to eventually use everything on the list, which is 30 or 40 names long. It's a road map for the next three decades of music.

YF: How many bands can you be in simultaneously?

GT: Zip Code Rapists was originally intended to be used for one show only. Neither John nor I intended to get tangled up in something this rotten.

YF: How did you, then? Get tangled.

GT: After my punk rock band, Hello Kitty On Ice, broke up years and years ago, I started doing spoken word comedy monologue routines. Somebody asked me to appear one time when I wasn't really in the mood and didn't have anything planned. I asked if I could bring my band, the Zip Code Rapists, even though there was no band. It was just a name on a list. I asked John if he'd be the band for that night. It was supposed to be a parody of a band more than an actual band. People just keep asking us to play and offering to put out our records.

YF: Do you have an obnoxious publicist and a sleazy manager?

GT: We don't have an obnoxious publicist. In fact, we've never solicited a single show. Our policy is to wait until we're asked. But we do have a management company in New York City called Lucky Love. They're trying to book us a show opening for Debbie Gibson, believe it or not.

YF: Right.

GT: Seriously.

YF: You think her handlers would let her appear with something called the Zip Code Rapists?

GT: Apparently so.

YF: Was Lucky Love responsible for Heyday signing you?

GT: No. Pat Thomas and I have been friends for many years. He's always been cheering us on. He put $200 of his own money into costumes for our first show. He said it was a loan, but he never asked us to pay it back. We did a couple singles for Heyday...

YF: A couple? I've seen one. You mean a couple copies?

GT: One was a promotional-only that was sent out to stores.

YF: What's the point of sending stuff that's not for sale to stores?

GT: I don't know. Ask Pat Thomas. It started out as a mutually satisfying relationship. He got the prestige of having us on his roster and we got someone to put out our records. Then he wanted us to sign a contract.

YF: Gross.

GT: We signed it and it turned out to be some kind of burn contract where we ended up owing him $500. Apparently that's what he gives to every band on Heyday.

YF: That's how he gets his costume loans back. For a while, there was a rumor going around that all the records on Heyday were really Pat Thomas recording under assumed names.

GT: He did that with Barbara Manning, supposedly. He even signed one of his bogus contracts accidentally and got sued by his own company. The thing that hurts most is that he was a friend.

YF: How do you get all the corporate sponsorships?

GT: We just call them up, tell them we have a good times music band that plays at car shows and company picnics and they start sending checks.

YF: Do they mind that you have multiple sponsorships from competitors?

GT: They don't seem to check up on it.

YF: They never come to your shows?

GT: Not that I'm aware of.

YF: I'd never have guessed tobacco companies are easier to rip-off than mail-order religions.

GT: It's a tax write-off for them. I advise all bands to call 'em up.

YF: And what?

GT: Ask for Bill or Dave, any common man's name. When you get him on the phone, tell him you have a band. It's good to drop names like ShaNaNa or *American Graffiti*. I usually say something about one of Bill Haley's original Comets. Then I ask for money.

YF: And they send you satin jackets and mesh back caps and posters and cigarettes to give away at shows.

GT: Sure. They pay for our equipment, pay for us to fly to some of our shows. Not all.

YF: Is that how you got to New York?

GT: Yeah. Lucky Love set up the shows. *TV Guide* underwrote part of it.

YF: Why would *TV Guide* sponsor a '50s doo-wop group?

GT: Part of a lawsuit settlement. It was cheaper to fly us to New York than to go to court.

YF: Why did you threaten to sue them?

GT: "Zip Code" is a copyright of the U.S. Postal Service and they used it as a clue in one of the crossword puzzles. I don't know why I did it—I must have been drinking—I sent them a letter calling it to their attention. I said, "You can't use 'Zip Code' without putting a registered trademark symbol next to it. I should know. I have this band..." They wrote back, "Who do you think you are telling us what to do? We're going to tell the Post Office about you..." And I wrote back, "I've already told the Post Office about you." They wrote back saying they were going to sue for harassment. I wrote back saying I was going to sue them for harassment.

YF: Jesus.

GT: We retained a lawyer who took care of the legal stuff. They said they didn't mean any harm and offered to settle out of court. So they flew us out to New York and put us up in their offices. Slept on the floor. Went through all the back issues.

YF: Why?

GT: So I could find out what was on TV the night James Dean died. It's interesting reading old issues of *TV Guide*.

YF: Steal any?

GT: Just one. A really rare one from the week of June 11 through June 18, 1973, which is one that I've been trying to find for a long time.

YF: Who's on the cover?

GT: Ted Knight. I'm trying to get every issue from every city, but those idiots only had the New York City copies in the New York office. They don't have any for other cities there.

BF: How many do you have?

GT: Every issue for the Las Cruces, New Mexico, area. About one-third of the issues from El Paso, Texas. It's gonna take a while to complete.

YF: A lifetime.

GT: I don't know that it's worth it but I feel compelled to do it.

YF: Are you familiar with the Hair Club For Men commercials?

GT: Yeah. Their spokesman is a bald guy who's both the president and a customer.

YF: Exactly. Of what organization would you like to be both the president and a customer?

JS: I'm into the Ronco infomercials where people spray paint their bald spots. My brother gave me a can of brown spray paint for my birthday.

YF: Tell about your daytime job.

GT: We work for a company that repackages hazardous chemicals. Our two main markets are fire departments and emergency rescue teams, and industrial music bands from Japan.

YF: Why would a fire department need, say, a bottle of hydrofluoric acid?

GT: They work in weird shifts: 48 hours without sleep and then they're off for 48 hours. They get sexually frustrated.

YF: When they're working or when they're not working?

GT: Working. There are no girls at the fire department.

YF: Forty-eight hours is long time to go without gettin' it on.

GT: It is. They tried having sex with each other, which they didn't get into. They tried masturbation and porn videos, which was okay for a while. Finally they said to hell with it and started burning their genitals off with chemicals. They'd heard about the scarification fad that's sweeping the youth culture on *The Jane Pratt Show*. They could go into one of those Haight Street genital removal acidburn tattoo places and it'd cost 'em. But by pretending they need it for fighting fires they can get the city to pay for it. Bureaucrats signing checks aren't gonna know any better.

YF: Does handling hazardous chemicals have an effect on your, er, aesthetic?

JS: Absolutely. It defines what the band's about. ZCR could not exist without exposure to hazardous chemicals.

YF: Do you mean exposure to the substances themselves or to the world of hazardous chemicals?

JS: The people who inhabit the world of hazardous chemicals.

GT: Working at HazTech allows us exposure to pinheaded people who've chosen as a profession careers that require them to deal with hazardous waste. I hear a lot of good voices to imitate and conversations that influence us. A lot of these people are slow. And petty. When you're being petty about hazardous waste, it's even more depressing than normal.

JS: The people who contact us every day are more twisted than we are because they're trying to determine which substances are hazardous chemicals: their noses and fingers are in the stuff all day. We just sell products that help them do that job. A lot of these people you might pay money to see perform at a club, but you can't because they're just people on the phone, like Jonathan Toodleman, who works for an environmental company in Los Angeles. He tries to weasel formulas out of us all the time.

YF: Is there a hazardous subculture like morticians have with their conventions and macabre sense of humor? Would there ever be a hotel full of laughing hazardous chemical experts boozing it up and dropping waterballoons out the windows?

GT: Sure. There was a hazardous materials convention in San Jose recently called HazMaCon. I've gone to a couple. You see things like "I Heart Hazardous Waste" t-shirts with the company logo on the back.

YF: Can you describe a hazardous chemicals nerd for me?

JS: He'd have a certain fascination with hazardous events like people getting blown through chain link fences or getting freon in their lungs and drowning, because it's heavier than air. The Amarillo sound is pretty much defined by hazardous chemicals.

YF: Even the pop series?

JS: The pop series is the product of people who aren't in the office every day. They still have a connection to the world.

YF: Why do you do so many covers?

GT: We do 60% originals.

YF: The industry average is 89%.

JS: We've had complaints about the number of covers we do.

GT: It's question of time. All the originals we do are made up as we record them. We don't rehearse. The shows are fucked up covers that we discuss an hour before.

JS: We only write when we're drunk and awake and have to write songs. Once that passes, we stop. The next record will have a higher percentage of originals because the scene demands it, which is wrong. There are a lot of great songs already written.

YF: They already exist and require—

JS: Very little work.

YF: You're meticulous about including songwriting and publishing information for your versions of songs which, more often than not, resemble the original in

name only. Do you actually pay royalties?

GT: Would you want to be mistakenly credited with having written "Good Ship Pablo Cruise"?

YF: Hm, good point. But at the same time, the closest I come to having anything to do with Pablo Cruise is when I skip over their albums at the record store. Have you ever been contacted by Pablo Cruise or any of the other artists whose music you've mercilessly slaughtered?

GT: No, but one of John's other bands opened for Aging Bull, which features Dave Jenkins of Pablo Cruise. It was nice seeing John walk offstage and then Dave Jenkins say, "Hey, good show," and then walk on-stage.

YF: A real Kodak moment.

GT: I don't know if he understood what was going on. He's a big, scary, mean fuckin' guy. Seven feet tall.

YF: The guy from Pablo Cruise? I thought they were all sunbaked nymphs with puka shell necklaces and Jimmy Buffett aspirations.

GT: That and seven feet tall.

YF: They're not bikers, are they?

GT: No, more like spoiled, Marin County session hacks who at some point had drug problems. They're the kind of people who had a period where they could've ended up on the street homeless but then within three years were composing theme songs for TV sitcoms, because there was someone there to pick 'em back up. I'd be happy to work with them, though.

YF: You'd look great with a puka shell necklace.

GT: Somebody should reissue their interview album because it's the most fucked up record I've ever heard.

YF: Was it another promo-only item intended to grease the palms of the retail elite?

GT: Yeah. None of them have anything to say. Each person in the band gets to say nothing in his own way. They take turns saying nothing and repeat the same stories. You hear four consecutive versions of the same story without any substance to begin with. Then you hear part of a song, then four versions of another story.

YF: They're not articulate or witty?

GT: Nah.

YF: No weird accents or anything? Is there any saving grace at all?

GT: 'Fraid not. You couldn't even transcribe this record. It wouldn't translate.

YF: Why did it ever exist in the first place? I mean, what about it seemed like a good idea at the time?

GT: Money.

YF: Oh, yeah. How obvious. Maybe Heyday will reissue it. Do you only do covers that you hate?

JS: That's a tough question because some songs are hateful but some are good.

YF: Gregg tends to do everything hatefully, though, so it's hard to differentiate.

JS: There have been times when the abuse factor has gotten so high, just for the sake of abuse. There have been enough pioneers in abuse.

YF: Such as?

GT: Andrew Dice Clay. But he goes out of his way to show that it's just a character. *The Day The Laughter Died* is one of my ten favorite albums of all time, and it's a *comedy* album. It's not even music. It's a suite. It's beautiful. I mean, I don't particularly care for *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, but that album is the *Sgt. Pepper's* of comedy. When things get out of control or someone in the audience is baiting him to say something offensive, he brings it down to earth and says, "C'mon, you don't believe all this stuff, do you?" He doesn't even need to give clues that it's not real, but he tries to be somewhat responsible, since there are audience members who are kind of stupid and want him to incite hatred.

YF: Are you familiar with Karen Finley at all?

GT: Yeah. She rammed a yam up her ass.

YF: It's probably going to say that on her tombstone.

GT: She's made a name for herself. Why do you ask?

YF: You have a lot in common. You're both confrontational performers, you've both recorded and released godawful music, you've both been interviewed in *Your Flesh*...

GT: What was her interview like?

YF: It was great. She seemed to get hysterical easily. She misinterpreted something the interviewer said and treated him like garbage. Wouldn't let him explain, hung up on him.

GT: What did he say?

YF: Something along the lines of advocating the use of judicious care and common sense about how you carry yourself when walking home alone at night through a violent neighborhood. To her, he was a racist condoning rape.

GT: I have friends like that. I say to be careful or suggest they call a cab, and they say they don't want to live like that, they can go wherever they want. These are the same blind optimists who are always getting beaten to a bloody pulp. Anyway, we don't use yams.

JS: At times ZCR has done stuff that's more astounding or pathetic than violent.

YF: Like what?

JS: Pathetic would be a bunch of cover versions that don't make it to the end of the song, or some guy crying and whining while the other looks at the ceiling. Astounding would be Gregg's sense of humor. I've almost wet my pants standing next to him several times.

GT: I like one of our shows at the Sixth Street Rendezvous.

YF: The one on the record?

GT: No, the follow-up to that, when nobody was there except for the singer from Caroliner and the local alcoholic bums off the street. We made up songs that we hadn't played before and haven't since. No one was there, so the whole thing had even less importance than a rehearsal. I was quoting from a book called *How To Be A Good Emcee*. I threw it on the floor, which the management thought was a gunshot. They tried to make us stop. We got into a big argument. It had a nice, sleazy, Tenderloin nightmare murder-about-to-happen feeling to it. It was an all-out depressing, pathetic failure, exactly what I like to go for. And no one was there to see it, which added to it for me.

YF: What did the alcoholic bums off the street do? If they're regulars, they've seen a lot of rancid shit on the Sixth Street Rendezvous stage.

GT: From the point of view that we try to get a reaction from people like that, do something so over the edge that even they notice, we failed on that level. But from the point of view that we were trying to have a pathetic failure sort of evening, it was perfect. They didn't take much notice. They might've looked up and yelled something occasionally. For the most part, they ignored it. It wasn't completely aggressive. It was just depressing.

YF: Has the confrontation ever worked so well that it turned into a real fight beyond yelling?

GT: At CBGB, someone threw three tables at us. They missed because I jumped out of the way. At the time I didn't think much of it, but when I watched a videotape of it, I saw that they were throwing three tables right at me. It wasn't a humorous parody of throwing three tables. The bases of the tables were filled with cockroaches. When the tables landed on the floor, the bugs completely swarmed all over the stage. Considering all the shit we've pulled, it's amazing worse stuff hasn't happened.

YF: Like what? Let's hear about your shitpull.

GT: You've got to promise to write

about it in the third person. There's nothing more disgusting than reading someone tick off all the highlights of their career. I'd hate to read some idiot going, "Well, first I bl-bl-bl-bleu, then I d-d-d-deu."

YF: That's where a good, obnoxious publicist would come in handy.

GT: We'd been warned and had the plug pulled many times by the people at the Heinz Club in Oakland because of excessive violence and destruction. Before one of our shows, I found a box of cardboard outside for recycling. I thought, "This is light, I'll bring this. It'll be funny. Cardboard." So I heaved this box of cardboard into the audience. It turns out cardboard is really heavy and destructive. It hit a table some people were sitting at. Broken glass went everywhere and the table knocked over. Everybody ran and screamed. The manager turned on the house lights, killed the P.A., and told us to get out of there and never come back. We said "fuck you," encouraged the audience to kill him, and continued to play. He kept saying "get out of here, get out of here." We kept doing the asshole routine and there wasn't anything he could do about it so he left. And the show went on.

YF: That's a career highlight? You get the plug pulled all the time. Tell about the Peter Fonda tribute you were involved with.

GT: There was a show that was a tribute to Peter Fonda. Two Peter Fonda films were shown at a time and bands played 15-minute sets between films. It was completely sold out. People were spilling out onto the street. Everybody was having a great time enjoying the bands and the movies. We showed up late and drunk, not having watched the films, even though the whole thing had been constructed carefully. We did "New York's All Right If You Like Saxophones," the Fear song. We ripped the screens down, threw things, yelled, "Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck," and ruined the good times atmosphere that all these people'd worked so hard to set up. Then we started doing "Her Majesty" over and over and over. The place cleared out so fast.

YF: The Peter Fonda tribute 10-inch is a recording of that night?

GT: No. Our version on the record isn't as long as it was at the show, and has a lot of sound effects and yodeling added. Jacques, the guy who organized the whole thing, liked the way we ended the show and wanted the record to end in a similar way. Something that would spoil everything that had been done up until that point.

YF: On the *Three Doctors* LP, one of you yells, "We are the essence of Rock'n'Roll!" Care to elaborate?

JS: At that particular moment, which was our second show, we were there purely for our own enjoyment and the enjoyment of the audience. We didn't care if we ever played again. I don't know if that's still true, but that night it was sublimely true.

YF: My favorite song is "Adams," from *The Man Can't Bust Our Music*. What's going on there?

JS: That's just me playing. It's a tribute to a genre of band that plays around the Bay Area. I've seen some of these bands and they seem pretty full of themselves and the importance of being avant garde and strange. I thought I could do what they do in a few minutes and I did it.

YF: Is it all improvised and random?

JS: No, not at all. It was thought out and written, not that many people would recognize it, but that's fine.

YF: You do a song from *Wired*, the movie about John Belushi.

GT: It's a completely inept movie, like *Plan 9 From Outer Space*. The concept and the execution are flawed and terrible. It's done in kind of an artsy way. Instead of just telling the story of John Belushi, they have his corpse come back to life and take a tour of his life given by a Puerto Rican cab driver. Instead of concentrating on the humor he was known for, all the jokes and all the dialogue come from the dead John Belushi. And the dead John Belushi isn't anything like John Belushi. John Belushi didn't have any of these conversations with a wise-cracking cab driver after he died, yet that's what most of his lines are. It's all fabricated. The best part is that they couldn't get the rights to any of the *Saturday Night Live* routines. They had to create bogus *Saturday Night Live* routines that supposedly captured the feeling of *Saturday Night Live*. They're not even as good as *Fridays* or any of the *Saturday Night Live* imitators. I'm not even much of a John Belushi fan, but Bob Woodward's book *Wired* is the best anti-drug document I've ever seen regardless of John Belushi. It's a terrifying portrait of drug abuse and addiction. Anyway, all the lyrics to that song are bits of dialogue from that movie strung together, which is why we gave the screenwriter partial songwriting credit.

YF: Have you ever seen *Ishtar*?

GT: Yeah. I loved it.

YF: It's a great flick. It's almost universally regarded as the pinnacle of bad Hollywood flicks-making. I thought the songs in *Ishtar* were incredible. I wish there was a sequel so Jacques could show them simultaneously and release an *Ishtar* tribute album.

GT: I've looked everywhere for the soundtrack album. It says it's available in the closing credits, but I don't know if it was ever pressed. I've looked through soundtrack catalogs, asked soundtrack dealers...

YF: Let's get some technical specs on "#9 Dream."

GT: At Pic'n'Save in Santa Fe, I bought a voice transposing megaphone sold as a children's toy. It's got three settings: normal, robot voice and kid's voice. I sang through the megaphone, switching from setting to setting as I felt would be appropriate to the lyrics of John Lennon and what he was trying to say with that song.

YF: Is a split over irreconcilable creative differences inevitable?

GT: He was talking about it just the other day.

YF: What would you do?

GT: I'd kill myself, as would some of our fans.

YF: Bullshit. It wasn't meant to last in the first place. Besides, you've always got your film career to fall back on.

GT: It's not really a film. It's a one-hour drama that's part of a series for PBS about American families. I'm in the one that's from an Asian perspective. A couple of white racist skinheads come in and fuck everything up. I'm only in four scenes, have a few lines.

YF: Is this some story you've made up to explain your Perry Farrell haircut?

GT: I don't know what he looks like, but I have a feeling it's not good. No, I'm made to look like a fascist skinhead. Short blond hair, suspenders, American flag shirt...

YF: Then there's that *Quincy* episode you did a few years back. Tell me about that trip to Texas you made with video artist Margaret Murray.

GT: One day, John and I were sitting at work and I said, "Let's drive to Amarillo, Texas, right now." And he took me up on it. He said, "Let's go," and I said, "That's kind of ridiculous, but we should drive to Amarillo, spend an hour there and then drive right back with no point to the trip." Margaret filmed nine hours of petty arguing, bad acting and boring monologues.

YF: Wish I could have gone.

GT: Do you want to hear about it or not? Save your snide comments for foreigners who don't know any better. If you want to interview us, fine, interview us. If not, then shut the fuck up.

YF: Yes, Miss Finley.

GT: That's it, I'm leaving. I don't need this shit. Gimme that tape.

JS: Gregg...

YF: Come on, I was kidding.

JS: It's okay. Look, just forget it, Gregg. He didn't mean anything.

GT: Fuck him, man. Fuck *Your Flesh*. I warned him.

YF: I know, you did. It's my fault. I apologize. I was out of line.

JS: He said he's sorry.

YF: We've gone this far, we might as well finish it up. Please. It's the wine. Really.

GT: All right. It doesn't matter anyway. You'll probably screw it all up.

YF: Finish telling me about the trip to Amarillo. I'm really interested in boring monologues and petty arguments.

GT: We rented a Cadillac with a cellular phone, stopped a few times and shot music videos. We did "Touch Me" in front of the Grand Canyon. We did "Beverly Hills" in Amarillo at a fucked up hotel that had gone out of business. It was all boarded up. We did "Wicked Game" at the Cadillac Ranch in Amarillo. "Woman," the Gary Puckett song, in Carlsbad Caverns, and "Three Doctors" at White Sands Monument. We also got pulled over by the police.

YF: Why?

GT: Because we looked weird driving a Cadillac. They wanted to search the car and hauled John into the back of the police car to ask him questions. They said he didn't have his seatbelt on. He said he did. They said he didn't. He said what's the fine. They said $300 cash and that we could pay them directly. It was one of those weird Texas nightmares you hear about. They said, "Do you have any contraband in the car?" John said, "Well, we have a bottle of Bushmills and three bottles of water with food coloring in them so they look like Bushmills because we're filming scenes where we're drinking and we don't really drink that much. They got a real kick out of that. What did you say?

YF: Me? Nothing. Clearing my throat.

GT: It was a return home. We found our old houses. My childhood home had been condemned but the door was unlocked. The bones of some of my relatives had somehow come up from the family plot. They we just sitting there in the dirt behind the house.

YF: Did you meet anyone on the trip?

GT: At Pea Soup Anderson's we got one of the guys working there interested in the whole project. He agreed to do a few scenes with us. After that, he sat down and had a heart-to-heart conversation with us about music because he fancied himself a jazz drummer. He thought the conversation was off the record but that's what we'll probably keep, because it was so funny.

YF: Do you two respect each other?

GT: Of course.

YF: Sometimes when you're playing, I get the feeling you don't like each other. John tends to apologize a lot. John, you almost seem ashamed to be seen with Gregg.

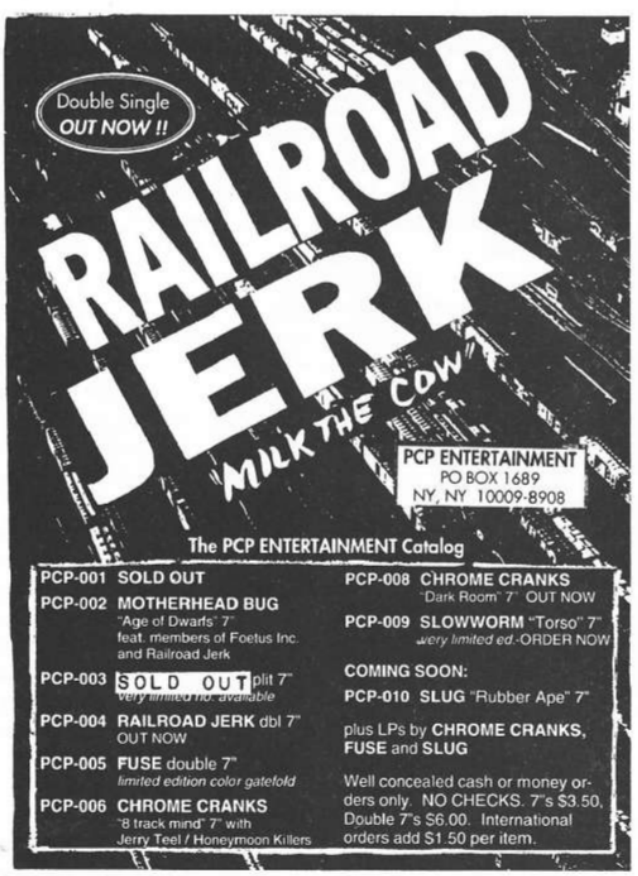
GT: No, no, you're reading into it. Well, he has quit on-stage a few times.

JS: The hateful facet of ZCR disgusts me, doing everything in a hateful manner. That's why I've quit several times, even on-stage. Since we don't solicit gigs or promote ourselves very much, that can work.

GT: He's a really good musician and I'm a classically trained operatic vocalist myself. Sometimes we have little squabbles, because we're trying to play the best show we can. We try to bring the highest level of professionalism to the show we can. If one of us falls a little short, the other gets a little bit mad.

JS: Gregg is far too violent a character, but if he's got to have a way to get it out of his system, I like to help. Sometimes.

YF: When you're quitting on-stage, you're really quitting in earnest?

JS: Certainly. There should be a certain amount of disgust in music. The fun thing about ZCR is that if someone says we suck, we can say "fuck you" and genuinely not care if they ever come see us again. We never asked to be there in the first place. It's wonderful feeling, especially if you've played music for years and years. It's liberating not caring if people like you or not. ✪

ZCR • c/o Amarillo Records
P.O. Box 24433 • San Francisco, CA 94124